



Environmental News

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EPA GIVES FINAL
APPROVAL FOR
DETOXIFICATION
PROCESS

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has given final approval to Syntex Agribusiness, Inc., to begin detoxification of 4,300 gallons of waste contaminated with dioxin stored in a tank at its Verona, Mo. plant.

Dr. Kay Camin, Regional Administrator for Region 7, announced that EPA had thoroughly reviewed the detoxification process and found it to be the most environmentally acceptable solution to the problem posed by dioxin.

The dioxin, a known cancer causing agent, was created during the production of hexachlorophene in Verona by a now-defunct chemical company, Northeast Pharmaceutical Chemical Co., at a chemical plant leased from Hoffman-Taff. Hoffman-Taff was subsequently purchased by Syntex.

Syntex has been undertaking efforts to determine a safe method of disposal. Incineration in this country was ruled out because of the very high concentration of dioxin. Syntex hired a team of experts with strong technical working experience in chemical engineering, photo chemistry and chemical process analysis. That team determined that photolysis would be the best method of disposal because of safety, environmental and public health considerations.

Photolysis involves extraction of dioxin from the waste using solvents and then exposing the dioxin to ultra-violet light for destruction.

Because the process is done in small batches at low temperatures, at low pressure and is totally contained, the possibility of fire hazards are minimized and potential release to the environment is greatly reduced.

When Syntex presented their plans to EPA in March, 1979, a task force was formed consisting of EPA's technical experts from around the country who are most knowledgeable in this subject and from technical experts from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources; the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health and the Occupational

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Safety and Health Administration in Region 7. This group worked closely with other state and federal agencies to evaluate and ensure the safety of the process.

In December, 1979, EPA formed a Headquarters Dioxin Work Group to provide EPA coordination on all dioxin related projects and issues in the nation. That group has thoroughly reviewed the process and has recommended to Dr. Camin that she allow Syntex to proceed.

EPA will oversee the process at the plant on a 24 hour-a-day basis and will have shut-down authority in case of any serious malfunction of the system. EPA will monitor continuously during the process to assure that public health and the environment are protected.

In April, 1980, EPA began background monitoring of the air and soil at the Syntex plant and in Verona. No evidence of dioxin was found in those samples.

In the unlikely event of a serious malfunction of the system, the Lawrence County Plan for Emergencies, already in place and familiar to Verona and Lawrence County rural residents, will be activated. The plan is on file in the Sheriff's office in Mt. Vernon, Mo.

Syntex expects to complete the detoxification process in mid-July.

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United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

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